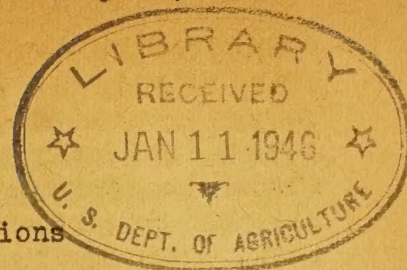


July 28, 1944

THE VILLAGE PUMP*
(Extension Among the Arabs)

By Afif I. Tannous
Office of Foreign Agricultural Relations



The village and the people.--One of our village welfare camps was established at the main spring, just outside Jibrail, a foothill village in the extreme north of Lebanon, where most of our work was centered. About 2 miles away stood Ilat, a small community of a few hundred people. In many ways this is typical of the Lebanon village community. It is compact in structure, with the farmers living close together away from their fields. As the occasion demands, they go out with their animals to work in the fields and come back at the end of the day. Consequently, social intercourse in the village is intimate and intensive. At one side of the settlement stands the old mosque. Next to it is a small open space, shaded by oak trees, where people hold their informal social gatherings. There they visit, gossip, and decide community affairs.

The people of Ilat are also typical of the area. Practically all of them are farmers who own the fields they cultivate. No social classes exist among them. About 50 percent are Moslems and 50 percent Christians. The two have lived side by side for generations in harmony. Unlike most of the Arab villages, Ilat shows no internal cleavages or feuds. Also in contrast with most Lebanon communities, no evidence of significant change in the people's way of life can be seen. This may be due to two main factors - an outlying location and the fact that few, if any, of the people have emigrated abroad. Another factor may be the absence of a school.

The main pillars or institutions that give shape to the people's life are agriculture, family, religion, and community. Each one of these is organically integrated with the others, and all of them together describe for the individual his daily pattern of behavior. Agriculture is truly a way of life to these people, characterized by strong attachment to the land, a conviction that in it lies their sole source of existence, and an adherence to ancient methods of cultivation. The blood tie is strong, and family loyalty is binding. Through identification with this unit, which consists normally of three generations living and working together, the individual feels more secure. Also the community rates him mainly according to the status and integrity of his family. Consequently, he is not apt to make important decisions or take new steps without the consent of his family group. In the same manner he manifests loyalty to the religious organization into which he was born. His affiliation is taken for granted, and no change of faith is expected by either the Christians or the Moslems of Ilat. The individual may not be well

*One of a series of case histories prepared for use in the conference on the Contribution of Extension Methods and Techniques Toward the Rehabilitation of War-Torn Countries, held in Washington, D. D., September 19-22, 1944. Extension Service and Office of Foreign Agricultural Relations Cooperating.

versed in the dogmas of his religion, but he really subscribes to the many rules of behavior it has inspired. Finally, each individual is conscious of himself as member of a community, which goes beyond land, family, and religion. The voice of the community is heard and normally obeyed in situations involving the various activities of life on the individual or on the group level. Like any other village in the Lebanon area, which has become known for certain outstanding traits, Ilat is characterized by neighboring villages as ignorant and backward.

The problem.--One morning a few of Ilat's people came to the camp and asked for medical help, saying that many of their children were stricken with "fever," the word they used to cover all sorts of internal diseases. Our doctor and two assistants went to the village to investigate. They came back in the evening and reported several cases of typhoid, malaria, and dysentery, and a high incidence of infant mortality. That was another case of the general health problem common to most villages. We promised to extend to them medical treatment and to do what we could along preventive lines, which was our general policy in solving the problem.

Analysis of the situation and suggested solution.--Further investigation revealed the probable source of trouble - a tiny spring in the midst of the village, which flowed into a stagnant pool. It was the only source of water supply, and we saw how it was being utilized. One woman after another emerged from the surrounding houses, each carrying an empty jar in her hand. (Hauling water is a woman's job, and a man would be ridiculed if he should be seen doing it.) With bare feet they walked in the dirty street, waded into the pool, drank, and gave their children to drink, filled their jars, raised them to their shoulders, and walked back home. Animals came to the pool too - cows and oxen, goats and sheep, and donkeys. They waded and they drank. So we thought that our line of action was clear and simple. Dig the pool deeper, cover it with a stone structure, and install a hand pump. It was as simple as that.

Reaction of the people.--One evening we called the elders to a meeting and informed them of our plan, requesting them to render as much help as they could. There seemed to be general agreement. In our lack of experience, however, we had not yet learned the subtleties by which a "yes" may mean a "no" in certain cases. The following morning, when we came to the village, ready to begin the project, we found the place practically deserted. They had all gone to their fields. The mukhtar (headman, a government official) made his appearance to tell us that the people refused flatly to let us install the pump. Let us install the pump! That made us pause and think. So that was how they felt about it; that we were imposing on them something they did not really want. And all the time we took it for granted that we were satisfying their urgent need. Something was certainly wrong.

With much difficulty we were able to bring them to another meeting a few days later. In the course of the discussion we did our best to make them talk freely; and they told us a great deal! The following are more or less direct quotations:

"Our fathers, grandfathers, and great grandfathers drank from this water as it is, and I don't see why we should make a change now."

"You say that you want to install a pump at the spring; but I for one have never seen a pump, nor do I know what might happen if it should be put there."

"I tell you what will happen. The water will flow out so fast that the spring will dry up in no time."

"Not only that, but the iron pipe will spoil the taste of the water for us and for our animals."

"You So and So," put in one of Jibrail's elders, who are much more advanced in their outlook than the people of Ilat, "do you like the taste of dung in your water better?"

"Well, I admit it is bad; but we and our animals are at least used to it."

"You have told us that the water is the cause of our illness and of our children's death. I do not believe that, and I can't see how it could be. To tell you the truth, I believe that the matter of life and death is in Allah's hands, and we cannot do much about it."

"One more thing. We don't understand why you should go to all this trouble. Why are you so concerned about us?"

"You say that the pump will save our women much effort and time. If that happens, what are they going to do with themselves all day long?"

Planning and sequence of events.--At the close of the aforementioned meeting we realized our analysis and understanding of the situation was not complete. We had studied the village and understood its organization, as previously described, but had not realized the high degree to which the people were averse to accepting any form of change, no matter how simple it was. We had to begin from the beginning, taking nothing for granted. An educational campaign was launched, starting with laboratory tests of Ilat's water and samples from neighboring villages. We emphasized to the people that the report on their water was very bad, whereas the other villages received good reports. The way the hand pump worked was demonstrated to them, and they were convinced that it would neither spoil the spring nor dry it up. Quotations from the Koran were cited to the effect that cleanliness was required from every faithful Moslem, and that man should do his best to avoid the danger of disease. At the same time, our girl workers visited with the housewives and explained to them how the pump would make their day's work easier and how they could use the time saved in taking better care of their children. They would not get ill so often, and fewer of them would be lost. Finally, we did our best to explain to the villagers that we were doing all this as our patriotic duty, and that it was their duty also to cooperate with us for their own benefit.

It took 1 whole month before the situation was ripe for action. We advanced the cost of the pump and its accessories, which we ordered from the neighboring town. We insisted, however, according to our working principle, that they should contribute the necessary labor and pay in cash or

in kind as much as they could. Two of our volunteers took with them a donkey and went from house to house gathering contributions. Toward evening they came back with a small sum of money and a heavy load consisting of barley, wheat, eggs, chickens, and fruit. The following morning the villagers started working. The pond was cleaned and deepened; a stone structure was built over it, and the village pump was installed at last.